

# Top 5 tips

## to keep your practice thriving during a recession

With all the financial doom and gloom out there it's easy to get worried about the impact of the recession on your practice. Here are some of the best strategies to beat the recession. I have personally used these techniques to ensure my own acupuncture clinic has stayed thriving. I have also taught many other therapists how to do the same.

**T**he strategies work whether you are just starting out in or if you are well established. They also work no matter what kind of therapy you practice. They are straightforward to implement and once you set them up, many of them run themselves, drawing in a constant stream of new clients, leaving you free to get on with helping people feel well.

*So, in reverse order, here are the top 5 tips for keeping your practice thriving during the recession:*

### 5 Offer a free consultation

This is one of the best marketing strategies you can use. It effectively takes all the risk away from prospective clients and means they have nothing to lose by paying you a visit. It also shows willingness on your part and builds trust and rapport.

I started offering a free consultation on my website and the number of enquiries tripled overnight. At another acupuncture clinic, we brought in free telephone consultations and again the number of enquiries skyrocketed. I have found that 90% of people who come for a free half-hour consultation sign up for at least five treatments. Now you may think that offering something for nothing is a waste of time and money, but I guarantee that people will be much more willing to make a financial commitment once they have met you and sampled what you have to offer. In the therapy world, more than anywhere else, the rapport and trust between practitioner and client is vital. You can even be very upfront about this and say that this is a chance "to find out if I am the right practitioner for you".

The key is to offer something of real value for which you normally charge. When I give a free consultation I simply give a shortened version of my diagnosis session. I ask the person what they would like help with and give a realistic evaluation of the benefits they can expect. I also offer any advice that they can implement straight away. By asking questions and really hearing the person, I

am almost always able to gain rapport and trust. At this point, the person will be more than happy to book a full session. Do not attempt to push your services, instead focus on giving and listening. You will immediately set yourself apart from the crowd.

### 4 Reward your clients for referring their friends

Every therapist knows that referrals are one of the best sources of new clients. But how can you encourage your existing clients to recommend you to their friends? The best way is to set up a referral system so that every time one of your clients refers someone to you, they get a discount on their next treatment.

You can easily do this by sending out a letter or email to all your clients. Explain to them that from now on every time they refer someone to you they will receive 40% (or whatever percentage you choose) off their next treatment once their friend has attended the first session.

You can also make discount vouchers for your clients to give to their friends. This way, both client and friend can receive a discount when a referral is made. Using both of these incentives together will massively increase your referrals. We implemented this strategy at a clinic in London and the number of referrals tripled from one month to the next.

### 3 Keep in touch with your clients via email

Keeping your practice thriving isn't just about attracting new clients. One of your best sources of new work is your existing client base. If someone has used your services before they are much more likely to do so again than someone who has never met you. That's why emailing your clients with your latest tips, advice and offers is a great way to encourage people who haven't come to see you for a while to get back in touch.

The best way to do this is to start a monthly email newsletter full of useful information that will enhance your clients' lives. Do not overtly sell to them or they will soon ask to be removed from your mailing list. Instead, build credibility and trust with your clients by giving them useful information. Newsletters also act as a gentle

reminder. Often people simply forget to book back in with you and an email is all they need to get them to book another appointment.

### 2 Communicate the benefits of your treatment in your promotional material

It doesn't matter whether it's a leaflet, a website or an advert in the local paper. The text you use to promote your practice can either make or break your promotional efforts. So many therapists try one form of advertising or another, only to be disappointed by the lack of response. Nine times out of ten this is because their approach to writing the text is fundamentally flawed.

The golden rule of writing any promotional material is that you must communicate to the person reading exactly how they can **benefit** from using your services.

Most therapists make the mistake of focusing on the **features** of their service, such as how their therapy works, how old it is, or how long they have been practising for. This is great, but it does not explicitly explain how the person reading can benefit from your treatment. For example, are they likely to feel more relaxed, invigorated or suffer less pain? These are the issues that are uppermost in people's minds. If you're buying a stereo, you don't want to know



about the gold-plated wires, you want to know how great the music is going to sound! Believe it or not, the same goes for therapies. The first thing people want to know is how you can enhance their life. If you can provide proof in the form of testimonials or scientific evidence, even better.

The most important place to communicate the benefits of your treatment is in the headline of your website or leaflet. Your headline will either grab the person's attention and make them want to read on or... not. If you spell out how they can benefit, right from the outset, your prospective clients will be much more likely to read on to find out more. If they then see that you offer a free consultation, they can see that they have a lot to gain, and nothing to lose, by giving you a call.

### 1 Get good at using the Internet to attract new clients

This is the single most valuable investment of time and energy you can make to ensure the long-term success of your practice. Most people now use the Internet as their first port of call for researching services of all kinds, and this includes therapies. In June 2009 alone there were over 4 million searches on Google that included the word 'therapist'.

Four years ago I learned about really effective Internet marketing for my acupuncture practice. Today I still get a constant stream of people contacting me for treatment via my website, even

though I hardly touch it anymore. This is one of the major benefits of Internet marketing - once you set it up it runs itself. When done properly it is also the most effective, and cost-effective form of marketing you can do. The reason for this is simple: the only people you are targeting are the ones who are actively searching online for what you offer.

So what do you need to know to be effective at online marketing? Well, the first thing you need to know is: Who is looking for your services online? What are they typing into the search engines to look for your therapy? Where do they live? What health concerns do they want help with? Once you know this, getting the right people to visit your website is easy.

Probably the best tool for finding your target market is Google's keyword tool, which tells you exactly what search terms people are using in Google to search for your services. For example, you can find out how many people are typing in the phrase 'massage therapist Manchester' into Google each month. You can also find relevant ways people are searching for your services that you wouldn't have thought of, such as conditions they are looking to get help with. Pretty useful! You can access the Google keyword tool at: <https://adwords.google.com/select/KeywordToolExternal> or type in 'Google Keyword tool' into Google and click on the result with the title: Google AdWords: Keyword Tool

Once you know exactly how people are searching for your services online, you can start to build a website based around what people are actually searching for, not what you think they are searching for. This way you not only get more visitors to your website, but those visitors will be looking for exactly what you offer.

You can learn the precise steps you need to take in order to do this, by downloading my free guide "How to use the internet to create an endless stream of new clients". This is exactly the same information I used to double my acupuncture practice in two months. To access the free guide simply go to:

**[www.therapymarketingtips.com](http://www.therapymarketingtips.com)**

So I hope you can see there is no need to worry about the recession. There are still plenty of people looking for just about every kind of therapy. It just means you have to put a little effort into smart marketing that sets you apart from the crowd. Most therapists don't like marketing, but if you know how to do it properly you can set things up once and leave it on autopilot to keep your practice thriving for literally years to come. You can then get on with the real work of helping people get well. **CHW**

**About the author:**

**© Michael Arnold is a licensed acupuncturist and a member of the British Acupuncture Council. He runs [www.therapymarketingtips.com](http://www.therapymarketingtips.com), a free resource, providing therapists of all types with proven marketing strategies to beat the recession and attain a consistently thriving practice.**

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